

SUZUKI PIANO BASICS FOUNDATION NEWS

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To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan.

"Win and Then Tighten the Strap On Your Helmet"

by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

Through my many years of teaching children to play the piano, I have never cared for repeatedly praising a child by saying, "Very good, very good," over and over again. The reason for this is that when students are praised in that way, they invariably come back the following week playing worse than before.

At the same time, when we think about the broad perspective, people enjoy being praised after trying their best. I realize that when praised, many people feel that they need to work even harder in the future. So I also know that it is important to give praise.

The reason students (maybe not all of them, but in general) always come back doing worse than before after being praised is that both parent and child feel, "I did it! I have perfected it!" and they feel relieved. They no longer pay sufficient attention to that particular piece and have gone on to focus their attention on practicing another piece. With that feeling that "I did it!" the attention and effort that had been given to the difficult passages that, until now, they could not play well is gone. The feeling and effort that they had put into it fizzles out of them like air released from a balloon.

There is a saying of the ancient samurai, "Win and then tighten the strap on your helmet." It means that if one becomes overly confident and does not pay attention after fighting and winning, he will end up being defeated by the enemy. It is a strict lesson that if you win you must prepare yourself even harder for whatever may happen next. This is not only true for practicing the piano, but is the same for all things.

When we improve, we should make the effort to try even harder. However, it seems that we cannot help but relax when we are praised by an instructor.

I can still clearly remember a long time ago when Dr. Suzuki was visiting my studio he told one of my more diligent students, "It is the end when you become good."

"What?"

"You see, there is nothing beyond good, is there? It is better to do everything poorly so that you will continue to try hard at whatever you do."

Whenever I get tough and say, "You are still not playing it well. You have to practice this point and that point," the following week there will always be improvement.

But then, if we only chastised students harshly, children will lose their desire to do well. We must skillfully intersperse a little praise within the strictness. When children (or even adults) are told by others to do something or are forced to do it and have no desire to do it, they will not be successful. When they have the desire to do well, they will amaze you with the ability they can display, even after you may have given up on them. No

matter how much effort the people around a child put into an activity, ultimately the child cannot be forced to do it. In the end, the individual him- or herself is the one who must do it.

However, to awaken that desire in children requires that the adults around the child praise and scold and use various means to stimulate the child and create situations to awaken that desire. It is important to give each child just the right mixture of praise and strictness to fit that individual. It has been said from long ago that the ability or inability to find the "appropriate prescription" becomes the ability or inability to lead and teach people. No matter how good the medicine may be, it can become toxic if overdosed. This means that it is wrong to overly praise or scold.

Teachers (of course) and you parents who are assisting your children daily, please practice strictly and happily so you may awaken the desire in each individual child.

(From the **Newsletter** of the Matsumoto Piano Teachers Association of the Talent Education Research Institute, Volume 4, Number 9, February 16, 1995, translated by Rev. Ken Fujimoto and edited by Karen Hagberg.)

"The Importance of the Arts to Human Beings"

by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

The year 1995 saw many frightening incidents occur in Japan, beginning with the great earthquake in the Kobe-Osaka area. Among these various disasters, the problem with the Aum Shinrikyo (the religious group charged with the Tokyo subway attacks) was astounding. At first, as I watched two representatives of the organization on television (Mr. Joyu and another person), I was puzzled that such handsome, intelligent young men would be involved in such a group, but after seeing them a number of times I came to realize that although they may have the brains in terms of doing well in their studies at school, they were like babies in terms of coping with life as human beings. I got the impression that they were only able to think on the level of middle schoolers. Then it came out that these two were not the only ones, that there were many highly educated people in the organization.

At the same time, I heard on some news program that there are many different and strange religious cults, but that highly educated people do not usually become members of such groups. So I began to wonder what was going on here. We seem to think of the Aum Shinrikyo as an insane organization, but in looking at the situation in a clear-minded manner the responsibility is not all theirs. We (all members of society) must consider why young people with bright futures ahead of them can become followers of such a religion.

Medical science has clearly found that the human brain is divided into the left and right brain. The knowledge of the left side and the emotions of the right side must develop together in balance for a person to develop fully as a human being. However, the children of Japan are presently growing under atrocious conditions. The aim of school and academics these days is solely the accumulation of good grades. Children are chastised into thinking that they must get 100% no matter what. Since Japanese society is motivated by such thinking, mothers without social skills or parents who feel that they are well educated are led into a situation where they force school study upon the child. We are teaching children that to be able to excel in school is all you need to become a great person.

When I was growing up as a child, although Japan was in the worst possible situation politically, children were still happy in our own way. A book that I read in the sixth grade was the inspiration that revealed a completely different world from the world I lived in, and after that I became an avid reader of novels. It was a time when there were no comics or television, so reading was an extreme pleasure, and I remember reading with my friends during class time. Being students, we conscientiously did our studies. There was not that much homework. We would help at home with our various chores, however, and then study arts or practice sports on our own outside school.

To our great misfortune, children today do not have the opportunity to study their emotional side. They do not have the opportunity to sweat and help with chores in the home. It seems that they are being raised in a very one-sided manner.

In this context, children who have diligent parents who allow them to study the arts are extremely fortunate. Children can encounter Bach and Mozart each day. Without even realizing it, their minds and inner beings are touched and influenced by the works of the greatest human beings in their experience. They also learn patience and perseverance because, after all, they must practice daily even if they do not like it. Is this not a marvelous thing for the development of human beings? People of culture in America and Europe know this and encourage both their sons and daughters equally to study the arts from the time that they are very young.

Should we not, in Japan, in view of this problem with the Aum Shinrikyo, rethink how we educate our children? Children who do well in school but cannot take care of their inner problems enter a religion they feel is strange and wonderful with the hope that it can revitalize the emptiness within themselves. This is not just a phenomenon that we can brush aside as being someone else's problem. I have come to feel that we must all reflect deeply on this issue.

(From the **Newsletter** of the Matsumoto Piano Teachers Association of the Talent Education Research Institute, Vol. 4, No. 11, April 24, 1995, translated by Rev. Ken Fujimoto and edited by Karen Hagberg.)

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER - "The Method of Teaching Beginners"

How to Teach Beginners by Dr. Haruko Kataoka is a newly-edited version of a series of articles which originally appeared in the **Piano Basics Newsletter** from Summer 1991 to Winter 1995 and in the **Piano Basics Foundation News**, March-April 1996 under the title: "The Method of Teaching Beginners." For the first time, all articles are available under one cover. Send requests to Piano Basics Foundation, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, CA 95831; Introductory Price - \$10.00 (U.S.) Postage \$5.00 (Free to PBF Members).

INTERNATIONAL SUZUKI PIANO CONFERENCE

Featuring Dr. Haruko Kataoka

August 11 - 16, 1996, Atlanta, Georgia, Seizo Azuma, Conference artist, First International Five-Piano Concert Student Friendship Concert Lessons, Lectures and More. Registrations are still being accepted. For information, contact: Pam Smith, 3993 St. Clair Court NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30319 (770) 457-5144 or Robin Blankenship, 2518 Country Lake Circle, Powder Springs, Georgia 30073 (770) 943-1218.

FOUNDATION NEWS

Our membership has grown to 240 members! Enclosed in this **Newsletter** is the first annual membership directory. If your name is not included and you paid your membership dues before July 20, please contact Linda Nakagawa, (916) 422-2952. Members who paid after July 20 will be announced in future newsletters.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The first annual membership meeting will occur at the International Suzuki Piano Conference, Atlanta, Georgia on Thursday, August 15, 7:30 p.m. in the conference hotel. Following the meeting will be an International Forum of teachers in attendance, during which we can share ideas in person. Please plan to attend.

NOMINEES FOR OFFICERS

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Cathy Williams - Hargrave, Mesquite, Texas
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Dr. Kataoka Receives Honors

In June, Dr. Kataoka traveled to Sacramento, California; Louisville, Kentucky; and Bellingham, Washington to work with teachers and students. In Sacramento, she received special recognition from the City of Sacramento and the State of California.

In Louisville, Dr. Kataoka was honored by a proclamation from the mayor declaring her an honorary "Louisvillian" and bestowing her a key to the city.

Again in Bellingham, Dr. Kataoka received special recognition when the mayor declared June 17-21, 1996, as "Dr. Haruko Kataoka Week". A resolution recognizing her contributions to children, parents, and teachers throughout the world was presented to her at the Canadian-American Friendship Recital. More details about these events and the workshops are included below.

State of California Secretary of State, By token of the Great Seal, the California Secretary of State Bill Jones takes great pride in congratulating Dr. Haruko Kataoka on the occasion of the dinner held in her honor, commends her love of music and her dedication and tireless efforts at sharing her multifaceted knowledge and talents. Music has no language or ethnic barriers and with appreciation to Dr. Haruko Kataoka and on behalf of the citizens of California, I offer her the highest praise and sincere gratitude of our citizens. This resolution is offered as a token of continuing friendship.

Submitted this 7th day of June, 1996

Bill Jones

Secretary of State

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA **Reported by Margaret Wong, Suzuki Parent**

Dr. Haruko Kataoka's continued effort in spreading her thoughts on Piano Basics has reached into many Sacramento families. Teachers and students both commend her for her deep love of music and her dedication and tireless efforts to educate and share her multi-faceted knowledge and talent.

During her recent visit to Sacramento, the capitol city of the State of California, the teachers and parents organized a dinner in her honor at the Sacramento Capitol Club on June 7, 1996. At the dinner, the City of Sacramento presented Dr. Kataoka with a City Resolution signed by the Sacramento Mayor, and Sacramento's

city councilmen. The Resolution was presented to Dr. Kataoka in recognition for her dedication to the City of Sacramento. On this same evening, Dr. Kataoka was also presented with the Great Seal of the State of California signed by the Secretary of State, Mr. Bill Jones. The secretary of State took great pride in honoring Dr. Kataoka on behalf of the citizens of California. To be presented with the Great Seal is an honor and is offered as a token of continued friendship. It was a very memorable evening! The teachers, parents and Dr. Kataoka were able to enjoy conversing with each other and discussing their thoughts on Piano Basics. It was extremely pleasing for everyone to be able to tell about the wonderful times together with the exchange students, practices, recitals, and workshops.

There are many devoted teachers, parents and students in Sacramento. We all appreciate the hard work of Dr. Kataoka and feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to study under her and learn from her experience. We all have gained a great deal in many aspects of life from Dr. Kataoka. She is a warm, compassionate, gifted human being that has blessed each of our lives.

**SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY
Reported by Elaine Worley, Teacher
Pocatello, Idaho**

Monday, June 10, dawned bright and beautiful as I hailed a cab at the Louisville Airport. In no time, I was at the University dorm where I found my home for the week. The facilities for piano study at the University of Louisville were amazing. The recital hall was so beautiful, and there were many practice rooms.

Each morning fifteen teachers assembled to study with Dr. Kataoka. It was quite gratifying to see everyone working together to improve--cheering one another on in our efforts to improve in the basics. It was also interesting to note that the students had exactly the same areas to improve---hmmmm.

Dr. Kataoka seemed to have boundless energy, teaching a very full schedule as well as giving an excellent lecture all five days. The lessons were wonderful, each suited exactly to the needs of the individual whether teacher or child. We were encouraged, challenged, guided, inspired and determined to improve.

One concern which Dr. Kataoka expressed to us is that American students don't know how to practice. She feels that we, as teachers, don't train the mothers and father's how to work at home, how to repeat the same thing for three to six months. She said, "perhaps American teachers teach with care, but after two or three weeks you skip to the next thing, and the mothers and fathers don't have time to get that part completed before it changes." For instance, Dr. Kataoka mentioned that even if her students can play the last piece in **Book One**, she still does 'ready-go" Twinkles every week for at least one to two years. We should ask ourselves, "Am I actually hearing the "ready-go" Twinkles at every lesson for one to two years?"

To summarize the fundamentals that Dr. Kataoka focused on may be the most efficient way to continue this article. Throughout the week these concepts were reinforced in many interesting ways: Preparation: body, arm, finger and mind; touch the key with the "fleshy" part of the finger, making the tone, then move; ask the families to try listening to the recordings for 24 hours a day--very low volume. She also stressed that legato is like singing--we must breathe (inhale/exhale), and do-re-mi will help the children to do this naturally. She truly hopes that we will teach do-re-mi with our students this year.

The three study steps which Dr. Kataoka mentioned were: first - memorize, second - musical tone (sound), third - musical sensitivity. In some cases, she found that the students were doing what had been requested, they just weren't doing it enough. Children can't produce a good, full tone unless someone else requests or requires them to do it. We need to use down-up exercises all the time, in order to acquire ability in using the body. Dr. Kataoka

asks us to avoid using a stiff hand. We must balance the elbow and forearm then we can maintain a relaxed body and soft hand.

Dr. Kataoka's heartfelt request was, "Please, everybody play the piano with the body this year." Please teach in great detail on small parts, so the students can improve. Please teach hands-separate practice. After the piece is memorized, please study it hands-separately. Dr. Suzuki was always seeking the highest quality artists such as Casals and Kriesler - he had the students study with these masters. But the teacher must teach the proper way to use the body. The student can't catch that from listening. Please research yourself how to make good musical sounds.

I am eternally grateful that Dr. Kataoka always repeats the basics!

BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON
by Patricia Pritchard, teacher and parent
Lafayette, Louisiana

Summerstar, the piano studio and home of Cheryl Kraft, was the site of the Canadian-American Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop. It was an inspiring and intimate setting in which to learn. Approximately fifty teachers were in attendance.

This was my fifth time to study with Kataoka Sensei. As the only Piano Basics teacher in Louisiana so far, I have come to value this time with Sensei and the other teachers so much. Each new group of teachers becomes my "research group" and I try to return home having carefully absorbed as much as possible. I feel we are fortunate that Sensei is willing to come to the United States to help us study how to enable all children to play the piano beautifully and that teachers such as those in the Bellingham area are willing to work together in order to make an event like this possible.

On the first day of the workshop, Kataoka Sensei jumped right into the teachers' lessons. Throughout the week, everyone in their varying stages of development received instruction on the **SAME** universal concepts of playing well. There were several points which struck me. One was that our arms should be carried as a bird's wings open to fly. It was a great illustration for the concept of carried arms and for me, that one point was worth traveling the huge distance to hear.

My daughter Lindsay was fortunate enough to receive a lesson with Kataoka Sensei also. Specifics of the lesson included how to practice an even softer accompaniment, a constant study point throughout the week for both teachers and students. Sensei reiterated the importance of listening to the compact discs, especially when time constraints keep a student from practicing as much as he/she would like. She said constant listening with short practices is far better than the reverse.

A highlight of the workshop was the impromptu meeting that followed the Friendship Concert where Kataoka Sensei discussed the performance with the teachers who had students that played. About 15-20 of us gathered around Cheryl's dining room table anxiously awaiting Sensei's thoughts. I felt honored to be meeting the way the teachers do in Matsumoto after their concerts and I found it to be productive. Our attention was focused back to one of the most basic of "basics": seating adjustment.

The most significant event for me as a teacher and mother while in Bellingham was Sensei's invitation to Lindsay to play in the Friendship Concert in Atlanta this summer. We are so isolated in Louisiana and I could not help but feel that Sensei was urging us to think bigger - to get out and hear and see the possibilities. There is no better place to do that at this moment in time than Atlanta. No doubt the spirit of excellence from the Olympics will still fill the air. Lindsay has been studying closely how gymnasts "get ready" while I am struggling with chair adjustment.

We are doing our best to rise to the occasion, working steadily and finding moments of joy in our struggle, but that journey is easier to make when camaraderie exists as it did among the teachers at the Bellingham workshop. I came away encouraged to keep up my study. I know we all hold the hope that working together, we can all become gold medalists.

Piano Basics Foundation News

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Call for Articles

The next newsletter will feature reports from Piano Research Groups. Please send your article as soon as possible to: Piano Basics Foundation News, 1487 Telegraph Road, Bellingham, Washington 98226.

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